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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1884
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8906
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7144
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5108
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3278
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5064
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1341
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0599
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4174
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9471
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6772
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1270
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3715
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000860

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB, S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: CPA DIRECTOR SARAVANAMUTTU BRIEFLY DETAINED AT
COLOMBO AIRPORT

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) On the morning of September 2, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the Center Policy for Alternatives and a high-profile critic of the Sri Lankan government, was detained at the airport for one hour when he returned to Colombo from Washington on a Sri Lankan Airlines flight from Dubai. When he went through immigration, Saravanamuttu was taken to the office of the chief of immigration, where he waited until an officer from the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) took him for questioning. He was escorted to the CID's airport office where he was informed that instructions were entered into the system on February 19, 2009 by the CID or Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) -- Saravanamuttu was not sure which -- to detain him for questioning when he entered the country. (NOTE: Saravanamuttu told Charge that he had left and reentered the country five times since February without incident. END NOTE.) CID officials told Saravanamuttu that similar instructions were given for Sunanda Deshapriya, former convener of the Free Media Movement and a vocal critic of the government. (Deshapriya is currently out of the country.)

12. (SBU) Saravanamuttu was returning, along with Jehan Perera, Executive Director of the National Peace Council, from a September 1 closed meeting at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, which was organized by S/CRS to discuss the current situation in Sri Lanka. Saravanamuttu and Perera also spoke in a public forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on August 29. Their trip to Washington was funded by S/CRS. Their selection for both events had been criticized in local media by nationalist columnists in recent days on the grounds that they were not representative of mainstream public opinion in Sri Lanka. Perera entered the country on the same flight but was not detained by the authorities. Charge, who was also returning on the same flight from personal travel to the U.S., remained, along with Perera, in the office of the chief of immigration until Saravanamuttu was released.

13. (C) COMMENT: As of the afternoon of September 2, Saravanamuttu had not contacted the TID to inquire on what basis instructions to detain him had been issued. Saravanamuttu characterized the incident as one of "basic harassment." (NOTE: This incident comes on the heels of a death threat against Saravanamuttu by unknown persons blaming him for undermining Sri Lanka's chances of retaining its EU GSP-plus concessions with his work on the human rights situation in the country. END NOTE.) He dismissed the CID's assertion that an order for his detention had been in effect since February since he had traveled in and out of the country without incident several times since then. He told Charge his detention may have been related, in part, to his participation in the August 29 and September 1 events in the U.S. but believed this was not the sole cause of his being detained for questioning, particularly since Perera was not detained. Rather, he interpreted it as part of a pattern of ongoing harassment. Post will consult further with Saravanamuttu regarding the utility of our making an official protest to the government regarding his detention.

MOORE